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ABSTRACT

This paper describes an in-service workshop on writing, which begins by having teachers air negative feelings and false conceptions about the writing process, involves the teachers in writing and introduces the writing process concept. A sentence completion activity, integrated with the viewing of a videotape, helps teachers examine their assumptions and misconceptions about the writing process. This self-assessment uncovers negative attitudes and anxieties about writing, reveals background knowledge of composition and related terminology, identifies individual problem areas in expectations of self and students, and releases fears and negative feelings as well as shared personal concerns. Finally, it involves teachers in writing, writing about writing, and writing to learn. A major part of the paper consists of sentence completion exercises. (EL)

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Teaching Teachers to Teach Writing:

Raising Your Composition Consciousness

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Teaching Teachers to Teach Writing:

Raising Your Composition Consciousness

In preparing in-service workshops on writing, I have found it useful and necessary to begin by having teachers air negative feelings and false conceptions about the writing process. Teachers at all levels have a great deal of unconscious apprehension regarding the teaching of writing. This seems due to two major factors: the general lack of experience all of us have in being taught the writing process as children, and the sometimes threatening nature of the personal act of writing itself. It is important to first acknowledge this affective variable.

I have also adopted the National Writing Project view of the importance of teachers actually writing during this experience, and of course, my third immediate objective is to introduce the process model of writing. A technique borrowed from the counseling profession and a product of modern technology have provided a solution and an introduction which integrates all three primary purposes. I have developed a sentence completion activity which I've integrated with the viewing of a videotape about writing.

Teachers have responded well to the sentence completion exercise which includes the following sentence beginning categorically interspersed with an outline guide to the videotape, "The Writing Process" (ASCD/NCTE):

Before viewing the videotape, use the following beginnings to write a complete sentence.

Writers _____

_____

Students think writing _____

_____

The most important part of writing _____

_____

Introduction and Overview

A. The writing process consists of four distinct though closely interrelated stages.
   1. Prewriting provides the motivation and warm-up activities that help writers prepare for their writing task.
   2. Drafting is the process of organizing and recording ideas in their original rough form.
   3. Revision is the ongoing process that overlaps each of the other stages and provides the clarifying, improving, and polishing dimensions of the writing process.
   4. Publication is the process of displaying the written product for general audiences or, whenever possible, actually distributing it to a predetermined audience.

B. The classroom climate is the environment which must be achieved before writers will actively participate in the writing process.
   1. Why is a supportive climate so important?
   2. How can it be established?
   3. How long does it take?

Before going on to the next portion of the videotape, complete these sentences.

People write because _____

_____

Writing is fun when _____

_____

People who are good at writing _____

_____

I. Determining the purpose of a writing assignment precedes the prewriting activities. Purpose includes
   1. The audience (varied, should be authentic)
   2. The topic (motivation is key)
   3. The literary type, or form (based on topic)
   4. The format of the final product (based on purpose)
   5. The amount of time available for the assignment

Now, complete these sentence beginnings.

Before I start writing _____

_____

Thinking about writing _____

_____

I avoid writing when _____

_____

II. Prewriting
   A. Prewriting is the process that helps writers get ready to write. (Like warm ups or calisthenics)

   B. Prewriting activities include
      1. Observing
      2. Thinking
      3. Reading
      4. Remembering
      5. Discussing

C. Prewriting strategies include
   1. Talking (build on oral language base)
   2. Writing lead sentences
   3. Developing word caches or lists
   4. Writing
   5. Taking notes
   6. Observing
   7. Keeping journals
   8. Reading
   9. Selecting models (good and bad)
   10. Role playing
   11. Pantomiming
   12. Giving oral directions
   13. Working on a group project

D. Teacher concerns include
   1. Activities appropriate to student's age and interest
   2. Student participation
   3. Establishing a comfort zone

Stop and complete these sentence beginnings.

I can't think of anything to write when _____

_____

My style of writing _____

_____

Writing is difficult when _____

_____

III. Drafting
   A. Prewriting activities lead to the drafting stage.
      1. Drafting styles differ from writer to writer, but momentum and the withholding of critical judgement contribute to the drafting process.
      2. Teachers should participate in and model the drafting process.
      3. Because drafting styles and paces differ, a wide range of activities will be evident in the writing classroom.

   B. Stumbling blocks in the drafting process are predictable.
      1. Getting started is the hardest part. (Start in the middle or with a word)
      2. Teachers should anticipate loss of focus (failure to stay on the topic).

3. Teachers should anticipate loss of momentum, which usually occurs at some point. ("Writer's block")
4. Teachers should be sensitive to interruptions in drafting due to lack of information. (More pre-writing may help.)

C. An error-free paper is not the goal of the drafting stage.

Pause to complete these sentences.

Revising or changing my writing _____

_____

Having my writing evaluated _____

_____

Proofreading my writing _____

_____

IV. Revision

A. Revision (to "see again") begins during prewriting activities and continues through the final draft.

B. Much revision is internal and, therefore, is unobservable.

C. During the revision process, writers critically read their own writing, becoming their own readers. (Self examination and questioning key)

D. Conferencing (orally or in writing) with students about their writing is helpful.

E. Teachers are frequently students' only audience. Teach students the skills (PSP process) to give each other feedback.

F. Conferencing and responding can be oral or written, teacher or student led, brief and informal or more lengthy.

G. Positive reinforcement combined with corrective comments is more effective in improving student writing than corrective comments alone.

H. The "PQP" process places reader and writer in a positive reinforcement cycle.

I. The "PQP" process must be used in sequence, but all stages need not always be covered.

J. Students will care about correcting, polishing, and proofreading their writing when they value their writing and are satisfied with its content.

K. Offer suggestions for evaluating criteria (checklist) and helpful resources for proofreading (dictionary, thesaurus, etc.)

PQP Process

P = Praise (positively reinforce writer's effort, find something worth praising) What do you like about my paper?

Q = Question (Probe for details, question purpose, respond as audience) What questions do you have about my paper?

P = Polish (Provide limited criticism for revising writing, focused feedback) What polishing do you think my paper needs?

Complete these sentences.

When someone else reads my writing _____

_____

Discussing my writing with others _____

_____

Seeing my writing get published _____

_____

V. Publication
A. Audience should be authentic
1. Teacher
2. Parents
3. Peers, other students (older and younger)
4. School publications (newspapers, anthologies)
5. Outside the school (newspapers, magazines, letters)

B. Choice
   1. Not all writing efforts need be published or shared.
   2. Only students' best efforts should be shared.
   3. Competition is generally not a good strategy.
   4. Collect individual efforts in a cumulative writing folder.

After viewing the videotape, complete these sentence beginnings.

Writers _____

_____

Students think writing _____

_____

The most important part of writing _____

_____

(Review responses.)

This process of self assessment (which can also be adapted to use with children of all ages) has had several benefits. First, it has helped teachers examine their assumptions and misconceptions about the writing process; it has also uncovered negative attitudes and anxieties about writing; revealed background knowledge of composition and related terminology; identified individual problem areas in expectations of self and students; released fears and negative feelings and shared personal concerns; and finally, it involved teachers in WRITING, writing about writing, writing to learn.

Generally teachers were asked to share their responses orally on a volunteer basis; responses were varied and individual. In reviewing written responses (collected for comparison) some consensus began to emerge, however, in an apparent predisposition to expect negative attitudes of students, to perceive real and imagined stumbling blocks in the writing process, and to express a misplaced dread of revision. Participation in this exercise, however, helped teachers articulate a new (more humane!) understanding of the writing process while exposing personal anxieties which could (hopefully) transfer to empathy for future student writers.

This exercise also has the flexibility to be both a pre- and post-measure of attitudes and knowledge. Many items elicited strikingly different responses after teachers became acquainted with current research and classroom applications (e.g. before: "students think writing is difficult and boring"/after: "students think writing is hard, but fun").

In fact, by the end of the workshop, teachers began to see that they perform multiple roles as teachers of writing. Each is now simultaneously:

- a writer and model of writing
- an author and sharer
- a composer and thinker
- an editor and proofreader
- a publisher and mentor
- a teacher and researcher